

**A CONFESSION IN THE SPIRIT OF OPENNESS  
RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING**

ARC

Mina,

Thanks for the great date. I've been on more than twelve of these things since I went on this site, and tonight's was the best one by far. I would love to see you again. Is the feeling mutual? I just wanted to clarify one thing.

At the end of our date, when we were walking back along Garvey Avenue toward the lot where we had both parked, I asked you if your ex had proposed to you or if you had proposed to him, and you said of course he had proposed to you, and I said, Not of course, and you said, Why, and I said, Sometimes women ask men to marry them, a woman once asked me to marry her, and you said a woman once asked you to marry her too, and I said, Really, and you said, Yes, she was serious, and I said, But you were already married, and you said, That's right, and I said, Well, how serious could it have been, and you said, Serious, and I said, You wouldn't have actually married her if you were single, would you have, and you said, I might have.

At that moment, as I glanced back across the street at the Shanghai-style dumpling place where we had just had dinner, I wondered if you were serious when you said you might have married this woman. Here you were this lovely—this tremendously lovely—woman I had just been out on a date with, this woman, you, whom I couldn't keep my eyes off, whom I could imagine greeting every morning for the rest of my life over café au laits in a breakfast nook, telling me, in your own perhaps inadvertent way, that you were leading a false life as a straight person. That you weren't actually interested in men (me?) at all. Or maybe you were positioning yourself at some middle register on the homosexual-to-heterosexual continuum and saying you were comfortable with men or women. Once I had considered the possibility that even though your dating profile says "Straight," as does mine, that you might prefer men or women, you'll recall that I met your honest disclosure (that you might someday marry a woman) with an honest disclosure of my own.

And this is the part I want to clarify, so that you don't go around thinking I'm something that I'm not.

When I said I was a 6.5, I meant that I find some men to be handsome and even physically compelling but that, so far as I'm aware, I do not want to have sex with them. (I would call that a 5.) Occasionally I have feelings for a man that keep me up at night out of curiosity about what it would be like to spend more time with him, but I would not call this sexual arousal. I would call it emotional connection, intellectual attraction, sympathy, combined with the feeling of liking to look at and listen to this

person so much that I must sometimes avert my attention from him in person so that I don't seem too interested. If that makes sense. And while it's true that I don't want to have sex with another man, I also don't identify as the kind of man who says he would never have sex with another man.\* I guess I would say that I am very happy being intimate with women and when I lack physical intimacy with a woman in my life, I miss it greatly.

You'll recall that at the end of our date, as we stood in the half-empty (or half-full, I'd prefer to think) parking lot, there in Monterey Park, you not wanting to show me where your car was because it was our first date and that's totally understandable—there *is* such a thing as privacy—I became embarrassed about admitting that I am a 6.5. I worried that you would not understand what I meant by 6.5, that you would find me less appealing. Believe me when I tell you: If I wanted to have sex with men, I would. I have opportunities. (In fact, during the last six years, when I've had only one short-lived girlfriend, and only sporadic dates, it has often seemed that I've had more opportunities to have sex with men than with women.) And to be completely honest, I sometimes find gay men to be more interesting, sensitive, and insightful than heterosexual men. For one thing, gays are an embattled and historically despised minority, and I find myself drawn to members of such groups. Gay men are often more eloquent than their heterosexual counterparts. They are often darkly funny. I have a friend here in Los Angeles, an indie filmmaker, who is gay, who is among

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\* Clearly, I think about it.

the most brilliant and compelling people I know. I love spending time with him (though our friendship is perhaps complicated by the fact that he resents me for being, in his view, a closeted homosexual, the proof of which is that I have never married, talk about homosexuality as if it is not a foreign land, and like musicals, Plato, Virginia Woolf, Barbara Stanwyck, ballet, Morrissey, and John Cheever). (For the record, I also like Bruce Springsteen, eating contests, the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition, and so on.) My three closest friends are heterosexual men; all wonderful—brilliant, sensitive, creative—and married with children. I have heterosexuality in common with them, although they are probably 7.5's, 8's, or 9's.

I remember right after I said I was a 6.5, you gasped and said, I'm a 9, and my heart sank, first because I couldn't understand how someone who identified as a 9 could want to marry a woman (can we discuss this on a future date?) and second, out of fear that you would not want to get close to a 6.5. I said, Do you mind that I'm a 6.5? And you—shockingly, since this never happens, since no woman, I sometimes feel, is ever going to accept me as I am—you said, I like it, it makes you unique, most people are 9's. And I said, How do I know you mean that and are not just saying it to be polite, people often don't express their true feelings, particularly to complete strangers that they just met online. And you said, Well, you'll have to find out. And then you added, I actually wish I were a 6.5, it seems a lot more interesting. I've always wanted to be a 9, I said. I've craved it, probably out of insecurity, and you said, Don't be insecure, and I said, But wouldn't you prefer to date a 9 since you yourself are a 9? And then you said—and this was so sweet of you—a 6.5 might be all right.

Okay.

So.

There's one other thing I'd like to bring up. In the spirit of openness. My mom has warned me a hundred times against doing this. Don't talk about this on dates, she'll say. Don't bring it up, you'll scare them away, give it some time, give it five dates, give it ten. But I feel strongly about this. There's a stigma attached to talking about mental illness that's not so with alcoholism any more. Maybe there was stigma attached to talking about alcohol abuse in our grandparents' era. But now people tell people they meet at parties they're alcoholics within ten minutes of meeting them, and it's all right. It's on the table. These alcoholics might even be admired for openly doing battle with their addiction. But with mental illness it's not that way. People are ashamed to talk about it. People don't have the vocabulary to talk about it. They have countless misconceptions. And the larger society reinforces the ignorance and the prejudice. So if I come across as being a little more forward in this area than some other people, now you'll see why.

I suffer from severe depression. Severe depression with two major episodes, both of which required hospitalization in excess of three months. I'm not going to go into the details here. Oversharing: bad idea. Except to say that with the second episode, six years ago—and remembering that episode still makes my bones hum—I experienced depression that was so grave, nothing the doctors did, including electroconvulsive therapy, could bring me out of it. I am told that I sat next to a

pay phone with my head in my hands for seven weeks. It just had to run its course.

Then again, I worry that I may not make it through the next episode.

Do you have mental illness in your family? I hope not, for your sake. It seems to run in families. I was reading not long ago that scientists are on their way to piecing together the genetic components of schizophrenia. That's cool. So many suicides in previous generations could have been prevented if the sufferers had had the range of psychiatric medication that we have now. Of course, nobody can make a person take a pill.

And then, lo, there is the example of my uncle Fred, which offers no grounds for optimism of any kind. My uncle Fred experiences a low-grade depression twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. He can't escape it, no matter what medication he takes, no matter how much he exercises and does yoga and follows all the conventional advice. His depression is like a news ticker, constantly broadcasting the particulars of a middling madness. The buzzing in his ears, the never-ending omens, the insulting slips of the tongue, make him try to avoid people, so that he doesn't subject them to his pull-downs, from which they might not be able to protect themselves.

You say you're close with your family. You say your parents had hard lives in China—Cultural Revolution, ration tickets for everything, mass suicides of intellectuals. You say that your



mother, a singer, didn't feel loved by her parents. You say that your father's parents, a theater director and an actress, died young. Once, you say, toward the end of their lives, for the entertainment of friends, your father's parents wrote and staged a play about two boys and a giant moth. In Chinese tradition, you say, it is often believed that the souls of departed loved ones return as moths. Some Red Guards heard about the play. Only five plays, approved by Mao, were allowed to be performed in China at the time. Your grandparents' play was deemed counterrevolutionary; they were severely beaten and forbidden from ever performing again. That's tough. I would love to talk more about all this on our second, third, or fourth date.

Have I told you enough times yet that you are fascinating?

You say that both sets of your grandparents had arranged marriages and that your parents were the first ones in your family to choose their own spouses but that you aren't always sure if they have been any better off because of it. Interesting contrarian position! You say that your father, a physical anthropologist studying pre-human and human craniums, and your mother, emigrated to the U.S. as soon as they were able to, in 1978. You were born the following year. You say neither of them ever pressured you to marry anyone, much less a Chinese guy, though you knew they wouldn't mind it if you did. For my part, I've always faced a certain pressure to marry a Jewish woman. It's not direct pressure. My parents live on the other side of the country and I'm my own person and have been for a long time. However, something in me really, really wants to tell you, right from the get-go, that I think you're super attractive,

super smart, and super funny, and I don't *need* to marry a Jewish person. I don't segregate the world, like many people I grew up around, into Jewish and non-Jewish. Or maybe a little, but I'm uncomfortable with the part of me that does that.

Which brings me to the Jewish guy-Asian woman thing. Many years ago, when I was living up in the Bay Area, I waited tables at a restaurant in Berkeley. It was a high-end pan-Asian place, twenty-five tables. All the watercolors on the walls, I remember, were of parrots. The chef was Jewish—he had traveled all around Asia collecting recipes and learning everything he could about the different cuisines, and he had a wife from Shandong province in China and two kids from that relationship. And one night, he was sitting out on the floor with her, in a booth—I remember it was a Friday night, date night—and the entire restaurant filled up, and I'm not kidding you when I tell you that twenty-one out of the twenty-five tables, including their table, had a white guy and an Asian woman seated at them. No exaggeration. And I don't know why exactly, but it made me sick. I wanted to put some kind of pill in all the guys' ginger martinis. Not that there's anything intrinsically wrong with a white guy dating—or marrying or whatever—an Asian woman. I would be most pleased to marry one myself. But that night it felt like it had just, I don't know, gotten out of control.

So what is it with all the Jewish guys and Asian women? I mean, this has been going on since the '90s at least. I've been to three of these weddings myself. You hear different theories: that Jewish guys prefer Asian/Asian-American women because these women tend to be educated, loyal, thin, youthful-looking, low-

key, adept in the kitchen, yielding, financially self-reliant, family-oriented, exotic. Of course, in your case, you've made it clear that you like Jewish people, in general, and Jewish men, in particular. That's great. That's really great. I think on that score alone, we're off to a nice start.

But, you added warily, as that steaming-hot plate of rice cake with minced pork and cabbage (yum) arrived at the table, Please don't tell me you have a thing for Asian women. And I said, I like all women. Which is true. I like Jewish women, I like non-Jewish women, I like Asian women. And, as I have mentioned, I like some men. I have never been in love. No woman has ever been in love with me. (The woman I told you wanted to marry me just wanted a green card and was willing to pay me \$17,000 for that purpose.) Do you think that's strange? I guess for some people love takes longer to hatch than for others. Let's leave some things to fate.

I do very much want to thank you again for going to the dumpling place with me. From what I've heard, Asian-American women don't usually want to go out on a first date to a restaurant, they want to just have coffee, then go from there. And if they agree to go to a restaurant, as you did, they don't usually want to go to one that serves food from the country, e.g., China, where their family is from. So I was happily surprised when I proposed the dumpling place and you agreed. Did I possibly charm you when I said you'd have to beat me down with a club to keep me from wanting to eat Chinese food in the San Gabriel Valley as often as possible? I hope so!

I once met a 96-year-old woman at the Y. She was actually lifting weights and doing jazzercise, and we just started to talk. And I asked her if she could boil down everything she had learned in her life to one sentence, and she said, "It's all luck." I thought you could relate to that. You say you feel lucky you have had a good life. (You play the cello professionally, for God's sake!) I feel lucky we went on a date. If I'm coming on too strong here, I apologize in advance. Chalk it up to being inspired by you.

Let's perform a thought experiment. Say you would like to go out with me again. What would we do? What adventure might we go on? I was thinking that we might try something a little romantic but not too romantic. We want to pace things, not turn up the flame too quickly. I know the assistant curator of the photography collection at the Huntington Library. Really nice guy. He helps oversee a million photographs. With emphasis on the history of Los Angeles, of California, of the West. With him as our guide, we could look through any batch of photographs you might be interested in—their collection is unbelievably great: Carleton Watkinses, Alfred A. Harts—then take a walk and check out the Rose Garden and the Desert Garden. You can't beat the Desert Garden. Over five thousand species of desert plants, with the wildest shapes and flowers. You'll be amazed. Then maybe we could go eat the hell out of some under-the-radar place in Little Tokyo or Koreatown. What do you think? :)

Thanks again for your loveliness.

See you real soon, I hope.

Sincerely,

Glenn

P.S. You have the same first name as my great-aunt from Vienna,  
who made it out in time!

ARC